



## Habitat Gardening in Central New York

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## Creating your habitat garden

### WHY?

Why it's so important to change our conventional gardening practices:

Tallamy, Douglas – **Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants** – *EXCELLENT!*

Stein, Sara – **Noah's Garden: Restoring the Ecology of Our Own Back Yards** – *A classic!* Fascinating story of her evolution from an ornamental gardener to a native plant/natural landscape gardener. And since she lived in New York State, it's especially relevant for us.

### General information and resources

**Stewardship Garden**, our wildlife habitat garden in CNY - <http://www.ourhabitatgarden.org> - The Design section is in the Habitat menu; also Earth-friendly topics, Plants topics, such as cultivars and botanic names, Creatures, and taking Action.

### Landscaping Your Yard (and lawns)

#### BOOKS

Summers, Carolyn – **Designing Gardens with Flora of the American East** – *Highly recommended!* Full of practical advice about how (and why) to use native plants in home landscapes. Very useful lists of plants in the appendices. The author lives in NYS, so she knows our plants!

Stein, Sara – **Planting Noah's Garden: Further Adventures in Backyard Ecology** – The how-to companion of Noah's Garden

Wasowski, Andy & Sally – **The Landscaping Revolution: Garden With Mother Nature, Not Against Her**

Wasowski, Sally and Andy – **Requiem for a Lawnmower: Gardening in a Warmer, Drier World**

### And for lawns and substitutes ...

Zimmerman, Catherine – **Urban and Suburban Meadows: Bringing Meadows to Big and Small Spaces** (There's a video, too!)

Bormann, L. Herbert et. Al - **Redesigning the American Lawn: A Search for Environmental Harmony** – not about the whole landscape, but good info and perspective on the lawn; creating Freedom Lawns

Daniels, Stevie – **The Wild Lawn Handbook: Alternatives to the Traditional Front Lawn** – Not about the whole landscape, but good ideas for lawn alternatives

### WEB RESOURCES

**Bayscapes from the Alliance for Chesapeake Bay** -

<http://www.allianceforthebay.org/library/publications/bayscapes> especially "A Homeowner's Guide to Designing Your Property." Nice templates for habitat landscaping; many of the plants mentioned are also native to CNY since we're close to the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

**Audubon at Home** – many useful pages from the menu at the left of: [http://www.audubon.org/bird/at\\_home/Backyard.html](http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/Backyard.html)

**The Audubon At Home Guide to Gardening for Life in Southeastern Pennsylvania** -

[www.audubon.org/bird/at\\_home/GuidetoGardeningForLife\\_PA.html](http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/GuidetoGardeningForLife_PA.html)

**Audubon At Home in Seattle: Gardening for Life - An Inspirational Guide to Creating Healthy Habitat** -

[http://www.audubon.org/bird/at\\_home/GardeningForLife.html](http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/GardeningForLife.html)

**Creating a Meadow** – Great how-to!

<http://www.wildflower.org/howto/show.php?id=5>

(OR just search on Meadow gardening at [www.wildflower.org](http://www.wildflower.org))

**Cornell's Lab of Ornithology's YardMap** - [www.yardmap.org](http://www.yardmap.org) -

"Learn" section (<http://content.yardmap.org/learn>) - a wealth of articles about creating habitat in your yard

Explore section (<http://content.yardmap.org/explore>) - info about this ecoregion

Featured Sites (<http://content.yardmap.org/explore/featured-sites>) - examples of gardens (including Stewardship Garden)

Create your own YardMap to share by logging in on the Map section

## CREATING YOUR HABITAT GARDEN

Wildlife Needs - keys in on the look and feel of a garden.

Layering – vertical layers

Diversity – diversity within layers

Edges – where different habitats meet

Other features: Insects as food, water, snags, bare ground, leaf litter, bare ground, protection from cats

\* Have a varied, 3-D, large enough, garden full of NATIVE plants

## DESIGNING YOUR HABITAT

Inventory what you already have and what the neighborhood has

Preserve existing **native** trees; protect root structure

Model your habitat on nature

Maximize undisturbed areas

Minimize straight lines

Rule of Three (or five or multiples of 3 and 5) plants

Use curving borders, random placement

It's dynamic: plants grow, multiply, die; habitat changes thru time

Leave growing room for bushes and trees

Consider opportunities for viewing wildlife inside and outside house

## SOME SIMPLE THINGS TO DO

Even if you do nothing else, plant an (eventually) large NATIVE tree

Add a hedge at your property edge full of a variety of native shrubs

Combine existing beds into one larger bed; fill in with native plants

Tuck in corner gardens, cutting curving edge and smothering lawn

## NEIGHBORS

B – Border – have a curving border

R – Respect – they have a right to their conventions just as you do

A – Advertise – display signs; have conversations

S – Start small – you learn as you go; neighbors get used to a new look

H – Humanize – include amenities for humans: chairs, paths, art etc.

Even conventional design—but using native plants—benefits wildlife

## WHY NATIVE PLANTS?

Insects evolved to eat native plants; insects are a prime food source  
The typical American landscape is full of non-native plants that don't participate in the ecosystem; some are invasive as well

Invasive isn't the same as aggressively spreading (e.g. wild cherry)

Native isn't the same as hardy; many non-natives will survive here

Native refers to plants appropriate for our ecoregions, not zones

Cultivars of native plants (i.e. “named varieties”) are designed for people – they don't always have the habitat properties wildlife needs

Learn the botanic, Latin names to know what you're really getting

## PLANT COMMUNITIES

The main plant communities to include are woodland, meadow, aquatic

Every yard doesn't have to include all three, though!

**Woodland** is especially important here in the Northeast

Plant native canopy trees, understory trees, tall shrubs, short shrubs

Herbaceous layers of ferns, spring ephemerals etc.

Snags (dead trees or parts of trees) are valuable wildlife habitat!

One way to create a woodland:

Get rid of non-native trees, shrubs as much as possible

Map out 10x10 area; throw a marker and plant a tree

Throw some more markers at random and plant some shrubs

**Meadow** can replace lawn and other unproductive sunny areas

Don't use “meadow in a can” mixes

Include native grasses with the native herbaceous plants

Long-term management saplings etc since it will want to be forest

**Aquatic** - Wildlife ponds aren't the same as decorative ponds

Be careful of roots of nearby trees when excavating

Have a beach, not walls or creatures will fall in

Use native aquatic plants – many sold aren't native; even invasive

Fish like goldfish or koi aren't friends to frog, dragonflies etc.

Birdbaths are sufficient as a water source; clean frequently for bird health and to prevent mosquitoes

## Information About Plants

### BOOKS

Leopold, Donald - **Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation** – Very useful reference to have on hand at home and when you go plant shopping esp. since they're all Northeast-natives

*The following Cullina books offer more in-depth portraits of native plants, but be aware that he includes native plants from the whole continent. Check geographical descriptions to find those native to CNY.*

Cullina, William - **Growing and Propagating Wildflowers of the United States and Canada**

Cullina, William - **Native Ferns, Moss, and Grasses: From Emerald Carpet to Amber Wave – Serene and Sensuous Plants for the Garden**

Cullina, William - **Native Trees, Shrubs, and Vines: A Guide to Using, Growing and Propagating North American Woody Plants**

DeGraff, Richard - **Trees, Shrubs, and Vines for Attracting Birds** (**CAUTION!** Also lists invasives, such as Norway maple, etc. etc.!) )

Elpel, Thomas - **Botany in a Day: The Patterns Method of Plant Identification**

### WEB RESOURCES

**Stewardship Garden: Our Habitat Garden in Central New York** – [www.ourhabitatgarden.org/plants/plants-home.html](http://www.ourhabitatgarden.org/plants/plants-home.html)

US Fish & Wildlife Service: **Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping** - <http://www.nps.gov/plants/pubs/chesapeake> - EXCELLENT! Very nicely organized; lots of info in a compact space. Most of the plants mentioned are also native here since we're close to the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

**Lady Bird Johnson's Wildflower Center** - <http://www.wildflower.org>  
Recommended native plants - <http://www.wildflower.org/collections/> - recommended for each state, special collections, etc.

**New York Flora Association:** <http://atlas.nyflora.org>

Lists ALL plants found in NYS – even invasives--so be careful! To find native plants, **use the filter and select NATIVE**. You can also search for plants known to be native to a specific county or groups of counties.

NWF's eNature: [http://www.enature.com/native\\_invasive](http://www.enature.com/native_invasive) - Describes cultural needs

Great Lakes EPA **Green Landscaping with Native Plants:** <http://www.epa.gov/greenacres> - a LOT of material for the Great Lakes area – some of it is very useful since it's our region.

**Connecticut Botanical Society** - <http://www.ct-botanical-society.org/garden/index.html> - A nice description and photo of native plants found in Connecticut, most of which are also native here.

**University of Connecticut Plant Selector:**

<http://www.hort.uconn.edu/Plants> - Just plug in your cultural requirements, height etc. and it lists plants that fit those requirements.

**Be sure to check the “Native” checkbox** since it will otherwise list any plant that fits the other criteria you selected – sometimes even invasive ones!